



DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

Fish and Wildlife Service

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FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE ANNOUNCES ADDITION OF LANDS AT BITTER CREEK NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE FOR PRESERVATION OF CALIFORNIA CONDORS

Assistant Secretary William P. Horn announced today that after several months of intense negotiations, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has purchased 11,000 acres of land as part of its effort to save the endangered California condor. The parcel, known locally as the Hudson Ranch, is located in the uplands of southern California and will comprise the major portion of the Bitter Creek National Wildlife Refuge.

"These lands will play a vital role in the Service's efforts to save the California condor from extinction," Horn said. "The area has a history of being one of the favorite foraging locations for these large soaring birds."

Negotiations culminating in the addition of the ranch to the Bitter Creek refuge spanned several years and involved numerous offers and counter-offers. In the end, the approximately \$3.9 million paid by the government for the Hudson Ranch and a smaller 1,300 acre parcel was less than half of the \$8.9 million made available by Congress for acquisition efforts on behalf of the condor.

Horn praised the dedication and diligence exhibited by Fish and Wildlife Service realty personnel and others involved in the negotiations. "The high degree of professionalism they displayed during these extended and complex negotiations resulted in the acquisition of vital condor habitat at a tremendous savings to the American taxpayers," he said.

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Biologists working on recovery efforts for the condor rate the Hudson Ranch as the most important area of habitat within the bird's present range. In 1950, as many as 50 birds were spotted in the area. As recently as 1982, a total of 14 birds were observed, representing the largest concentration in recent years.

Presently, Service biologists are using the ranch as a base of operation for an effort aimed at capturing the last two condors--both males--remaining in the wild. The decision to trap these birds was made after wild condors suffered an unacceptably high mortality rate over the last few years. When captured, the two male condors will become part of a breeding program underway at the San Diego and Los Angeles zoos where 24 other condors are already in captivity.

The Bitter Creek location will play a key role as a release site for future captive-bred generations of condors and will be managed to enhance the habitat for these releases. The first releases are expected sometime between 1990 and 1992, depending on the success of the captive breeding effort.

The original proposal to acquire the ranch dates back to 1982. The Audubon Society and several other conservation groups supported the acquisition and Congress first appropriated funding for the acquisition in 1984.